DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 132 234 UD 016 632

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TITLE	Attitudes and Characteristics of Black Graduate Students.
INSTITUTION	Maryland Univ., College Park. Cultural Study Center.
REPORT NO	CSC-RR-3-76
PUB DATE	76
NOTE	12p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Doctoral Programs; Educational Attitudes; Educational Needs; Financial Support; *Graduate Students; Marital Status; *Negro Students; Occupational Aspiration; Policy Formation; Racial Attitudes; School Attitudes; *Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; Student Participation; *Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	*University of Maryland

ABSTRACT

A random sample of 170 black graduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park was sent an anonymous questionnaire concerning their characteristics and attitudes towards academic and nonacademic variables. They tended to agree most strongly that they were certain of their vocational goal, that there was at least one person in their department they could talk to regularly, that black students usually take longer to get their degrees than white students, that black faculty seem interested in black students, and that the racial climate on campus is generally tense. They tended to disagree most strongly with statements that students have ample opportunity to participate in policy making, that channels for expressing student complaints are readily available, that social life for black students on campus is good, that most administrators act like they really care about students, and that there is good communication between black students and the administration. Students reported that what they like most about the University was the location (29 percent) and the quality of education (27 percent). They liked least the racism they encountered (23 percent), the bureaucracy and red tape (23 percent), and the lack of an intellectual atmosphere (14 percent). Forty-seven percent reported that there were no black faculty in their department. (Author/JM)

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ATTITUDES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF BLACK GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Research Report # 3-76

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Summary

A random sample of 170 black graduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park were sent an anonymous questionnaire concerning their characteristics and attitudes toward academic and nonacademic variables. Returns from 120 (74%) indicated that 62% were married, 77% were working (44% fulltime), 52% were pursuing a Ph.D., 44% were majoring in education, 13% in business, 9% in psychology, 7% in agriculture, 5% in English and 4% in economics. Fifty-three percent were receiving financial aid of some kind, including 16% with graduate assistantships. Forty-seven percent reported there were no black faculty in their department, 19% reported one, 17% reported two and 17% reported three or more black faculty in their department. They tended to agree most strongly that they were certain of their vocational goal, that there was at least one person in their department they could talk to regularly, that black students usually take longer to get their degrees than white students, that black faculty seem interested in black students, and that the racial climate on campus is generally tense.

They tended to disagree most strongly with statements that students have ample opportunity to participate in policy making, that channels for expressing student complaints are readily available, that social life for black students on campus is good, that most administrators act like they really care about students, and that there is good communication between black students and the administration.

Students reported that what they like most about the University was the location (29%) and the quality of education (27%). They liked least the racism they encountered (23%), the bureaucracy and red tape (23%), and the lack of an intellectual atmosphere (14%). When students were asked what they would like to see changed at the University, they most often reported better teaching (23%), more black faculty (19%), change the racist attitudes and practices of faculty, staff and students (12%), and more black students (9%). Implications for educators are discussed.

During the past ten years an increasing number of predominantly white colleges and universities in the United States have made efforts to increase the enrollment of black students on their campuses (Astin, King & Light, 1975; Sedlacek & Pelham, 1976). These efforts have stemmed from a general pressure to extend equal opportunity to all educational levels through affirmative action and other equal opportunity programs. While there has been some reporting about black undergraduate students on white campuses (e.g., Miller & Dreger, 1973; Sedlacek & Brooks,1976), there is little information available on black graduate students. What data are available appear to concern admissions and numbers of degrees awarded. There is almost nothing available on how black graduate students feel about their education or student services, and what changes they would suggest.

Blackwell (1975) reports that approximately 48,000 Ph.D.'s are produced each year, yet there is still a critical shortage of black holders of the doctorate degree. Blacks constitute about four percent of all sociologists holding the doctorate, five percent of psychologists with Ph.D's, two percent of the economists, and one percent of the historians, physicists, biologists and chemists. Only one of every 420 American Ph.D's is black. This situation of extreme under-representation of blacks among holders of the doctorate degree exists despite increasing efforts to produce more black Ph.D's. Between 1930 and 1972, of the 244,829 doctorates produced in the United States, only 1,860 of them were black. However, 14,668 or 6.6% of the total were classified as minorities. The 976 blacks who received doctorates in 1973, out of a total of 33,727 awarded that year included 760 black American citizens, 58 non-United States citizen immigrant visa holders, and 160 non U.S. citizens.

The Graduate Record Examination Board in conjunction with the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States conducted a survey of graduate school programs for minority/disadvantaged students (Hamilton, 1973). The main findings of the

study were: (1) of the 110 schools surveyed, 80 indicated that they had specifically designed policies or procedures aimed at meeting the needs of minority/disadvantaged students at the graduate level; (2) the number of enrolled minority students at the graduate level has continued to increase since the initial survey was conducted in 1969; (3) continuous evaluation of an institution's efforts for minority students has been lacking generally, or for the most part, based only on the simplest criterion. Little attention has been given to the students' life outside the classroom or to his/her post degree requirements; (4) the size of an institution's graduate program and its location on a rural to urban continuum are powerful determinanats of its ability to respond to pressures for increases in minority enrollment. Size has the function of increasing an institution's ability to finance such students; location tends to determine what kinds of activities are undertaken. A related and important finding of this national survey was that, while a number of institutions have made demonstrable efforts to recruit and enroll minority students, only half of these have developed academic programs specifically designed for the interests of these students (Hamilton, 1973).

Studies concerning blacks in professional schools have also tended to focus on institutional "head count" data (Smith, 1972; Baird, 1974), although Johnson and Sedlacek (1975, p. 932) report "Medical students are often thrown into a rigid academic environment. Faculty members or others who have not established this environment may not be prepared to provide more flexible programs for students from different backgrounds with different learning styles and different understandings of what medical school is all about."

The purpose of the current study is to assess the feelings and reactions of black graduate students toward their academeic and non-academic environment.

Procedure

A random sample of 200 black graduate students enrolled at the University of

Maryland, College Park was sent an anonymous questionnaire and cover letter explaining the study. Thirty questionnaires were returned because of incorrect addresses, and mail and telephone followups resulted in 120 of 170 (74%) questionnaires completed. Followups were possible because a postcard indicating name was returned by the students separately from the anonymous questionnaire.

Results

The sample was 56% female and 44% male. Most of the students were married (62%), had been attending graduate school for at least two years (63%), and 77% were working (44% full time). Fifty-two percent were pursuing a Ph.D. degree, 21% an M.A., 12% an M.S., 6% an Ed.D., 13% an A.G.S. and 6% another degree. The most common majors were: education 44%, business 13%, psychology 9%, agriculture 7%, English 5%, and economics 4%. Fifty-three percent were receiving financial aid of some kind, including 16% with graduate assistantships. Their primary reasons for atttending the University were location (36%), offered a program of study of interest (36%), and quality of education offered (12%). Eight percent indicated that Maryland was not their first choice of school.

The variables which contributed most to their educational development during the past year were: coursework in major field (40%), independent study (33%), and work experience outside the University (19%). Forty-seven percent reported there were no black faculty in their department, 19% reported one, 17% reported two, and 17% reported three or more black faculty in their department.

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of responses of black graduate students to 16 Likert attitude items. They tend to agree most strongly that they were certain of their vocational goal, that there was at least one person in their department they could talk to regularly, that black students usually take longer to get their degrees than white students, that black faculty seem interested in black students, and that the racial climate on campus is generally tense.

They tended to disagree most strongly with statements that students have ample opportunity to participate in policy making, that channels for expressing student complaints are readily available, that social life for black students on campus is good, that most administrators act like they really care about students, and that there is good communication between black students and the administration.

There were only two significant differences (t-.05) between male and female responses to the attitude items. Females, compared to males, tended to feel that black faculty were more interested in black students, and that campus social life was better for black students.

In an open-ended item, students reported that what they liked most about the University was the location (29%) and the quality of education (27%). They liked least the racism they encountered (23%), the bureaucracy and red tape (23%), and the lack of an intellectual atmosphere (14%). When the students were asked, in an open-ended item, what they would like to see changed at the University, they most often reported better teaching (23%), more black faculty (19%), change the racist attitudes and practices of faculty, staff and students (12%), and more black students (9%).

Discussion

On many of the items the black graduate students responded similarly to students in general, regardless of race or year in school. For instance, Schmidt and Sedlacek (1972) reported that attitudes of faculty and administration and availability of channels for expressing student complaints are among the key variables related to the satisfaction of undergraduates in general. Also programs offered and geographical location have been the primary positive features of the University to undergraduate students in general (Handley and Sedlacek, 1976), black undergraduates (Van Arsdale, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1971; Sedlacek, Brooks and Herman, 1971), and "no-shows" who were accepted but did not matriculate (Carrington and Sedlacek, 1975). While the percentage of black graduate students majoring in education may seem high,

it is similar to the percentage for whites in education (Blackwell, 1975).

The unique findings of the study seem to relate to racial variables. While undergraduate blacks have also shown concern for racial variables (Brooks, Sedlacek and Mindus, 1973), the focus on black faculty and the relationships of the graduate students to them is perhaps most pronounced. Graduate students are more limited to contacts with faculty within their major departments than undergraduates. Also black graduate students are closer in training and career orientation to the faculty. This increases the need for role models one can look to for advice and counsel.

That black graduate students see racism as a problem in their education has the greatest implication for what needs to be done in graduate education. The phenomenon of racism should not be dismissed as the rhetoric of the unreasonable or malcontented: the obligatory verbiage that comes with being black. In fact, much evidence indicates that the best black students are most likely to detect and understand racism (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976). Racism has been operationally defined, extensively researched, and specific methods for its elimination have been proffered and evaluated (Sedlacek, 1974; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1973, 1976; Troy, Sedlacek and Chapman, 1976). According to Sedlacek and Brooks (1976, p. 5) "Individual racism is action taken by one individual toward another which results in negative outcomes because the other person is identified with a certain group. The group may be racial, cultural, sexual, ideological, etc. Institutional racism is the action taken by a social system or institution which results in negative outcomes for members of a certain group or groups." The six-stage model offered by Sedlacek and Brooks as a remedy to racism was designed to be employed in educational settings and its use in graduate education would be appropriate.

We are reminded that graduate students also need student services and one should not assume that they are too mature or have other interests. What we are

suggesting is that the services they need most focus on changes in their environment. Rather than to assume that the individual student needs help, we have much evidence, including the current study, that the way we can help the individual student the most is to alter the context in which he or she is educated. If we were to eliminate racism as a problem for black graduate students, note how really positive the overall results of this study would have been.

Table 1.

Means* and Standard Deviations of Black Graduate Student Responses to Attitude Items

	Mean	S.D.
University students have ample opportunity to participate in University policy making.	3.57	.85
Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available.	3.45	.97
Social life for black students on campus is good.	3.41	.80
Most administrators here act like they really care about students.	3.37	.92
There is good communication between black students and the administration.	3.35	.95
Most of my courses are stimulating and exciting.	3.19	1.09
Most faculty advisors here act like they really care about students.	3.17	1.02
Most instructors here act like they really care about students.	3.13	1.06
I would recommend the University of Maryland to a black friend.	2,97	1.16
White faculty in my department seem interested in black students.	2.96	1.09
White faculty seem to have lower expectations for black students than for white students.	2.91	1.14
The racial climate at Maryland is generally tense.	2.88	.96
Black faculty in my department seem interested in black students.	2.68	.90
Black students usually take longer to get their degrees than do white students.	2.58	1.07
There is at least one person in my department who is available for me to talk with on a regular basis.	2.43	1.21
I am certain of my vocational goal.	1.75	.95

* 1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree

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